

Researching Migrants and Diasporas Online through the Nigerian Case: The Example of Triangulation

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Abstract. This work explores best ways of examining the connection of Nigerian migrants with origin online. It seeks to understand whether the migrants are able to communicate with Nigeria and if so, under what circumstances and in which ways. The premise of the study is on prevailing perceptions that the Internet is a ground-breaking medium in communication and principally in international communication. Therefore, the project studies the possibilities of communicating with Nigeria and the implications of this, if possible. In addition, if not, the reasons responsible are to be explained. The chances of communicating and its meanings shall be examined at four main levels as follows:

- To what extent are the migrants able to use the Internet in communicating with country of origin? Is the Internet only a tool for personal or group communication, or just a source of information? Is it all of the above or none? How different is it from preceding media of communication, like the radio, television and print?
- Does their Internet activity have any implication for transnationalism? The question arises because migrants and diasporas are transnational communities. And the present age of globalisation features cross border activities of moving groups and communities. Do the migrants therefore contribute to our understanding of transnationalism through the Internet?
- Is migrants' engagement with the Internet useful for our understanding of nationalism? If the answer is affirmative, how is it so? And if not, why is it like that?
- Does the Internet contribute in any way to the shaping and reshaping of migrants' identities, in a world where technologies of communication have become another means through which identity can possibly be

constructed and (re)constructed in its complex and multiple forms?

These key points are not necessarily exhaustive. They however represent social issues that the process of communication affects. An investigation of the issues was in the light of my theoretical discussions of key matters around the project. It is also to see how the chosen Nigerian migrant case implicates them. The issues are obviously multi-stranded. The research was therefore one requiring a painstaking process, so analyses and discussions could be as close as possible to reality.

Keywords: International communication, transnationalism, construction, reconstruction.

1. Methodology

In doing this, my methodology was therefore both online and offline. It was online because the activities of participants were examined on the Internet. It is offline because the migrants exist in the real world, but possibly engage with the Internet to augment real life. Across the two spheres as a result, qualitative and quantitative methods were adopted. While qualitative research guaranteed causal explanation of process, the understanding of relationships, thoughts and dispositions (Grix, 2001; Silverman, 2005; Goldbart, 2005:16), quantitative method gave room for standardization, the formation of categories, confidentiality, and the figurative expression of results (Frankfort-Nachmias, et al, 1996; Blaxter, et al, 1996; Berger, 2000; Fowler, 2002). The mix of qualitative and quantitative research helped in the adopted triangulation technique. It ensued that the methods were mutually supportive and enhancing, which minimised margin of errors (Georgiou, 2001: 97; Blaxter, et al, 1996; Grix, 2001:83; Mason, 1996:25, cited in Silverman, 2005; 121). In triangulating therefore, interviews, and participant

observation, which are variants of qualitative research, were used. Survey method, which is of quantitative research, was also adopted. Though some techniques were simultaneously applied online and offline others were exclusive to one space. For instance, while participant observation was both online and offline, survey was offline. Importantly, investigating online connections, disconnections, and possible meanings from there requires high degree diligence. This is more because of the status of the web as a domain of disparate structures with several social, economic, cultural and political elements (Schneider, et al, 2005:157).

Examining the intricacies thus demand a careful choice of techniques (Guimaraes Jr, 2005: 157), against the background of challenges in studying the Internet. A multi-levelled approach and attention for every facet in the course of their execution is one way of understanding the convoluted space of life online. This is to ensure maximum aggregation of clues, which should instruct analysis. The overall aim is to be as close as possible to the production of answers to the emergent questions, principally the problem of connection with Nigeria online. Other than that, many reasons, as evident in Chapter 2, triggered migration amongst Nigerians. The understanding of these dynamics and their relationship with their online agency is yet an invitation to a multi-methodical enquiry. Apart from this, questions of diaspora and migration are usually inter-disciplinary. They are in disciplines like sociology, cultural studies, political economy, human geography, and communication (Karim, 20031; Vertovec, 2004:2; Brubaker, 2005). With such spread, a single strategy will appear inappropriate especially when the area of focus combines communication and migration. Furthermore, intervening or moderating variables were in consideration as the methods relate with each other in the eventual analyses. I will now proceed to discuss these methods, why and how they were used, their effectiveness and limitations.

1.1 Qualitative Research

Interviews: inquiring through dialogues, consultations, discussions and interrogations

A popular research technique, interviews are a way of gauging opinions (Barbour, et al, 2005:41) on issues relevant to a research hypotheses (Frankfurt-Nachmias, et al, 1996:232). Many professionals do use it, for instance the police when interrogating suspects; the journalist when engaging a source; and the medical doctor when consulting a patient,

amongst others (Keats, 2000; Berger, 2000:111; Barbour, et al, 2005). It is different from ordinary conversation in that the circumstance of information gathering is controlled (Keats, 2000:1). Through it, a questioner (the interviewer) seeks to obtain information from a respondent (interviewee), believed to be knowledgeable in the area. The interviewee may know enough in some circumstances to volunteer information on an issue. An exchange or conversation between the interviewer and the interviewee, the process often offers an investigation more information than observation would do (Berger, 2000:111). While observation, Berger (ibid) says, is simply characterised by the present, actions, contexts and what is happening, interviews are about past and present, attitudes, motivations, hearings and probing (p.113). A researcher may consider interviews in the case of limited empirical data or the need for detailed assemblage of information. It could also be because of expectations that a prospective source is conversant with a subject, or the need to dig deep based on the views and opinions of interviewees, so data can be fresh, raw, and insightful (Creswell, 1997; Denzin, et al, 1998; Guion, 2007).

Research interviews are also of different types. Most notably, they are structured, where the researcher consistently follows a set of questions. It could be semi-structured, where questions are a guide but conversations could sometimes veer off the schedule. It is unstructured, where the investigator exercises little control on the process, following the outlining of questions. A fourth, informal interview, as Berger (2000:111-2), notes one where controls are absent and “they just take place, are not organised or focussed, and are generally used to introduce researchers to those being studied” (p.111-2). Interviews generally seek to find meanings, motifs and themes through a guided conversation with the subject. Probing of an interviewee takes place for clues, leads, facts and data about a subject matter. They are a means of digging deep into subjects’ worldview in a discursive circumstance (Barbour, et al, 2005:43).

Various procedures for the usually dynamic course of interviewing (Keats, 2000:21) are available. There are the face-to-face, where a direct engagement with the subject takes place; or the administration of questions through means in a non face-to-face contact. The distribution can be through the post, through telephone, or through e-mail. It can also be through other delivery methods like hand-to-hand. The researchers’ goals of credibility, validity and convenience are often a factor in choice of interview

techniques. The processes are essentially characterised by clarifications, interpretations, recordings, thematisations, designing, transcribing and analyses (Creswell, 1997; Denzin, et al., 1997; Keats, 2000; Guion, 2007). Much as interviewing can be rewarding, questions can be on its overall relevance. For instance, appropriating single or few meanings to a complex process of interaction may be problematic. In addition, subjects' statements are likely to vary between what the interviewer hears and what the true picture is (Gubrium, 1997, cited in Silverman, 2005: 45). Silverman (ibid: 45) also refer to Holstein and Gubrium, (1995) on the question of whether respondents are natural with responses or simply volunteering "constructed narratives". Data from interviews may be helpful, but it consequently raises questions on information from the "real self" or the "constructed self", the "natural" from the "artificial" and/or the "stage-managed self" and the "unmanaged self".

"Controlled" dialogues

The interview technique was a means of getting closer to the migrants. It was to give a first-hand view of the sampled people's lives, from a closer range, to see how they are and how they feel about the way, they are. It would have made little or no meaning investigating a people without talking to a sample. By meeting and questioning them, I heard them, sensed and felt their joys and pains and have them confirmed or deny these. Interviews could reveal intervening or moderating variables unseen in other methods like surveys and observations (Blaxter, et al, 1996). The fact of being a predominantly face-to-face affair initiates a contact that heightens a sense of activity, and realness. I experienced these with many of those engaged. Supple and possibly result yielding, it can however be costly and time consuming (Keats, 2000). In this case, I shuttled between London and Leeds about half a dozen times and spent periods in London, which is not my base and had to incur an anticipated extra-cost of living temporarily away from a regular address.

My interviews were semi-structured. They led to and involved in-depth discussions, besides reflecting standardization (Burns, 2000:423; Berger, 2000: 112). Because of many emergent leads, necessitating follow-ups, several easily resembled the unstructured. Some sessions gravitated from semi-structured to unstructured interviews, (although cases like this were few). Some participants also insisted on the semi-structuring, which was originally in use. The chosen semi-structuring was good for the larger sample. It enabled a better control of the process,

apart from ensuring uniformity. With a notebook, a mini-recorder and my questions outlined on paper and in mind, I had no difficulty managing different interviews' sessions and situations. Apart from containing drafts of the questions, the notebook was mainly useful for noting of facial demeanour, body languages and otherwise non-verbal communication. To ensure it does not distract interviewees by momentary attentions to it, one had to be careful. It was rewarding in many instances as facts on their complemented those from my observations.

Those interviewed were either in London or in Leeds. For emphasis, cost and convenience influenced this. Sampling of participants was random. *Snowballing* (Georgiou, 2002), however took place in cases where some categories were missing. Forty migrants were in the first instance interviewed. Roughly put, each session lasted a minimum of 40 minutes and a maximum of one hour. Those talked to included twenty men and twenty women, further divided evenly between London and Leeds. Care was also in evidence to include the young, the old and the middle-aged. It included nine under 30's; eleven people between ages 30 and 40; fourteen interviewees between ages 40 and 50 and 4 people above age 50. The spread also concerns class stratifications: skilled and unskilled; educated and uneducated; and rich and poor. In the second instance, which was between February, and March 2008, I set out to add ten more interviews. Again, it was to be between London and Leeds. Five was to be in London and another five in Leeds. I was eventually able to do three in each place. I did not again do the ten more as planned, because the outcomes were becoming repetitive. Again, the additional themes I wanted to explore were unambiguous. They were principally around alternative media of communication other than the Internet. It includes the television/cinema; radio; the print and issues around nationalism (See appendix....). These themes of course featured in the first instance, but required further explorations for reasons of clarity. The outcomes on many issues were recurring because new perspectives were becoming difficult to come by from the statements of participants. I felt therefore, that I could do with the forty-six overall in hand. The additional means of data collection were another source of hope. It led me to believe that not doing the four remaining would not impair the result. Also noteworthy is the fact that the last six interviewees comprised of both men and women of different ages. There were two women from Leeds and one from London. They also cut across occupational categories, and lived in different places. In London, they were in Thamesmead and

Brixton, and in Leeds, it was in Kirkstall, Morley and Chapeltown. They were of ages 29 and 38 in London; and 30, and 50 in Leeds. I discovered the categories at a random.

The scarcity of any category necessitated *snowballing*. It was difficult to tell the legal from the illegal migrants, amongst the lot. While it is easier with the former, because of some level of confidence, it was difficult to ascertain the latter even in cases of indicative hints. Differentiating between the two may not however matter much in answering the research question, given the likely similarity in the experiences of those who travel and dwell as one of travails (Portes, et al, 1996:156). As expected, some respondents were enthusiastic. A few were not. Many wanted an extra reassurance that the aim of the interview was simply academic. I gave a further guarantee on the importance of their anticipated statements. Venues were different. In the first instance, some interview sessions were in pubs. Many of them were initiated at meetings and later conducted in homes, offices, pubs, and in cars. Some of these meetings included a christening ceremony in Holborn Terrace, Leeds; a Nigerian group meeting at Memorial Drive, Meanwood, Leeds; a birthday gathering at Alwoodley in Leeds; a Church function at Central library in Leeds and another birthday celebration in Kirkstall, Leeds. In London, they were mainly initiated or conducted in restaurants, pubs, parks, hotels and in homes. In addition, these took place in places like Brixton, Liverpool Street, Peckham, Leytonstone, Pimlico, Canary Wharf, Notting Hill, Hampstead, and Vauxhall. Several took place in company of friends, family members and acquaintances. It was more the case with women, who were with their spouses, partners, child or children. The interviews were in different places, circumstances and before different sets of people because venues could not ordinarily be self-determined. It mainly depended on the preferences of the interviewees. It was only in London that two interviewees opted to meet me in my hotel room. Different locations could be a pointer to the disparate nature of the migrants' residency place, just as it gives room for situating them in multiple geographical contexts. The ability to adapt or not in those circumstances can also become evident, and could be beneficial to analyses and discussions. It may also prevent predictability, and can complicate geographical categorisations. In my circumstance however, I preferred to have the interviews done where the sources wanted rather than losing the chance because of disagreements on venues. A deliberate attempt was to engage those who have lived in the UK for no less than five years. The

accuracy of this may not be perfect, but a question on it preceded every interview session. Those below five years were not in consideration. There were only two instances of this amongst my sample. The aim was to ensure that I do not take a temporary resident or visitor for the intended long-term migrant. It was also to ensure that those encountered were representative of a "typical" migrant experience, likely ascertained through long years of staying outside Nigeria.

The entire process for the first set of 40 interviews took place between February and June 2006, a period of about five months. On some occasions however, I had reasons to contact interviewees on issues they raised, again. This was for further clarifications were possible for some investigated themes. The repeat sessions were always exerting, sometimes implying extra-cost, but always very useful. In doing the interviews, I used a mini-recorder for reasons of accuracy and credibility. This was however with permissions out of respect for participants. I transcribed interviews as I went along, where doable. In some cases, it was after a few interview sessions. Thematizations began after the entire transcription. In doing this, I outlined themes on key premises. These were on the subject matter of online connection, disconnection, expression or feeling of nationalism and leads on identity construction and indications of transnationalism. With an avalanche of transcribed materials on hand, notes, and recorded observations from the interview, the sieving and refinement process was characteristically messy, maddening and sometimes overlapping. To deal with this therefore, the Constant Comparative Method (Maykut, 1994; Hewitt-Taylor, 2001) was in use. This implies the inductive identification of categories and units of meanings; separating the categories or meanings with a code or label; and re-reading of the transcriptions again to check if there are valuable themes missed out while initially identifying and separating the categories and meanings. If this emerges, new categories are created or the freshly identified meanings are integrated into those earlier sorted out. A fine-tuning of the processes followed these. Then the examination of relationships amongst the categories was done and lastly the integration and analysis of data. The key meanings identified from the transcriptions were as they relate to the communication ability of the Internet or lack of it; nationalism evidence or its absence; indications of transnationalism; and identity construction and reconstruction. I added the eschatological issue of return during a review of the categories. The addition was because of its relative importance and its usually controversial state. The issues may not be exhaustive but they were central in the general confessions of

participants and are core enough to the exploration of the relationship between theory as discussed in Chapter one and the agencies of participants. The entire exercise required further sifting many times over for reasons of credibility.

Participant observation: a witness to migrants' online and offline agency

Participant observation seems an improvement on simple observation. Instead of just observing, the researcher is involved in the investigated activity. Earlier associated with anthropology and now with ethnography (Silverman, 2005:379), it involves the application of the sensory organs, to wit: the eyes, the ears, the nose, the mouth and the hands for the discerning of meanings (Jones, et al, 2005:138). Significant as a method, the data from the senses are eventually sieved and evaluated, based on "how the researcher understands 'being in the world (ontology) and the nature of knowledge (epistemology)'" (Jones, ibid: 141). Observations come through the prism of details like the researchers' worldview, preferences, biases, background and identities. Also regarded as a unique form of observation (Jorgensen, 1989:7), it could imply a deep integration with the group studied or some defined membership status (Frankfort-Nachmias, et al, 1996: 282). Success in it is dependent on the skills, flair and affability of the researcher (Jorgensen, 1989:8; Berger, 2000:167). It may as well require the learning of the "language, habits, work patterns, leisure activities, and other aspects of (subject's) daily lives" (Frankfort-Nachmias, et al, 1996: 282). It enables the researcher to see the world of the subject, not from a distance like mere observation, but probably like the subjects see it, through a first-hand experience. Helpful to interpretative studies, the method gives further room for the analysis of both verbal and non-verbal clues (Gunter, 2000:5). It could ultimately be relevant for proper perception. Participant observation requires a simultaneous or close process of joining, integration, monitoring, watching and note taking (Jorgensen, 1989; Frankfort-Nachmias, et al, 1996; Gunter, 2000). Though note-taking time may be a factor of the researcher's judgement, it should not be too far from the time of activity to avoid forgetting (Gunter, 2000). It should also not be often enough to constitute distraction to subjects.

A veritable form of qualitative research, participant observation requires the establishment of rapport with subjects (Hammersley, et al, 1983), to ease interaction. Though the atmosphere may become less controlled upon involvement, the onus is on the researcher "to balance two roles: that of being

participant and that of being observer" (Berger, 2000:161). There is also a need to avoid "going native" (Berger, ibid), meaning, "becoming so identified with this group that they lose their objectivity" (p.161). Objectivity, credibility and reliability are in the need for the researcher to be reflexive, and to be reviewing of his role in relation to his subject and his study. A concern for this could help to minimise its drawback, which is to a degree the difficulty in determining the complexity of human action (Jones, et al, 2005:138). Berger (2000: 166-7), also raises several problems. These are the possibility of losing focus and the problem of "reactivity". There is also the issue of whether or not subjects are behaving in a certain way because of the researcher's presence. The problem arising from errors in what to note and not to note as well comes in. Problem of mind reading, implying an assumption of what the subject of study means through actions and inactions is also on note. Other than this is the ethical question of identity disclosure: that is should subjects be aware of researchers' motive or not? However, it makes sense to say that participant observation allows for a more integrated scrutiny of groups, in their natural setting even while the result is dependent on the researchers' worldview.

Participant observation in use

My approach was multiple in applying participant observation to this research. One of its elements is the gathering of facts from a serendipitous insight into the ways of the Nigerian migrants. It took place in interactions with them at meetings, in shops, restaurants, and through participation in Nigerian church activities. It also took place through casual listening to stories, reports and experiences of Nigerians abroad. These were at formal and informal forums, with friends, family members, colleagues and acquaintances and even from host society members. Many facts came from here. Some of these included gripping stories of some migrants' experiences: how they began, how they have settled or failed to settle; deportations; work experiences; educational and health services' experiences and such others. Complementing techniques reinforced or reduced some of these facts to nothing. Again, I also occasionally took part in newsgroups' discussions, chats, and e-mail exchanges with the people. Interpretations of Facebook, *Bebo* and Myspace discussions were also a part. Other than this, cross and multiple postings of information revealed data that gave clues and directions for analyses. Specifically, I randomly observed a newsgroup thrice in 2006. It stretched through the first weeks of March, April and May of that year. The periods were

chosen in a random for probability reasons. Averages of ten contributions, -long, short or medium- come to the list every hour. I observed them for eight hours on each of the working weekdays above. With the ten postings per hour contribution, it meant I examined an estimated eighty articles on each day. By the end of the spaced third week, I had observed roughly 400 contributions. This is apart from other chat rooms of observed websites (See diagram below). This process was advantageous because it was inexpensive, and was useful for learning about the conversational prowess of the migrants. It was sometimes tiring as it involved prolonged sitting behind the computer screen. Excitements came at intervals through jokes and gripping contributions of some participants. The overall objective of examining a people in their natural online setting was also motivating. Its representative capacity may raise questions, the fact that other methods mix with it should weaken the effect of the drawback.

As an ethnographic method, it helped in the generation of meanings, not necessarily in the quantitative, positivistic dimension but through a complex interplay of actions, and how the actions are interpreted (Hammersley, et al, 1983: 1; Goldbart, et al, 2005:18). Also involving integration, or immersion with the group studied, a simultaneous writing about groups was a key characteristic (Fetterman, 1998:1; Denzin, 1998; Silverman, 2005:49; Goldbart, et al, 2005: 18). What is written is not necessarily selective but largely inclusive to depict the routine lives of the people, in the bid to examine their behaviours and thoughts (Fetterman, 1998:1), as expressed online.

Moreover, for the broader ethnographic method, it has an alternative in the technological field of the Internet. Now an important frontier for the modern ethnographer (Fetterman, *ibid*), the Internet has become a huge resource base for the ethnographer's search for meanings, embedded in the cluster of human offline activity. The density of online activity can as well represent the process. While the former is natural and traditional, the latter is technological, implying mediation through technology, as against the physical, face-to-face character of offline field (Wikipedia: accessed 12.06.2007). The possibility of a technological based "field" of the Internet is however still an issue in ethnographic methodological debate (Hine, 2005:1; Beaulieu, 2005:183). The closeness of life online to life offline, sustains chances of a version. This enamours thoughts on the possibility of virtual ethnography.

Aspects of techniques used for this investigation implied prolonged immersion on the Internet ways of Nigeria migrants. It was through an observation of websites, which witnesses a frenetic space of construction, and through the examination of newsgroups, where their activity witnesses a high-level sleeplessness. It further takes place through their blogs, which constantly multiply and through criss-crossing mailing lists' postings. It arises again through noting of a cacophony of participants' comments, then through numerous searches of Nigerian migrants' related online materials. Sharing of ideas with participants, peers, and colleagues, and downloading, analyses and interpretations of materials considered relevant to themes is another instance. It becomes therefore sensible to assume the Internet space as a field, where one was long engrossed or submerged, for observation purposes. This is in the search for meanings, in the mould of traditional ethnography.

A typology of the more than seventy websites studied is below. This may however not be perfect, but it is simply "to provide the framework for interpretation" (Hiller and Franz, 2004:737). It may overlap, but they are based on the prevailing dominant interest. The search for meanings as they relate to key theoretical themes like possibilities of communicating, transnationalism, nationalism, and identity shaping and reshaping led to the websites' studies. The attention paid to every site could not be equal, as some were obviously more instructive than others were. The supposedly less popular sites got considerations when necessary. A number of factors led to the discerning of the supposedly popular websites. These were confirmation from websites that pose to keep record of traffics like www.alexa.com. Then volume of online and offline references to these sites were considered. The references came in offline interactions and more in online spaces like Nigerian related homepages, newsgroups, chatrooms and usenets. Many respondents to the survey questions also referred to these websites as their favourites. The interview sessions also revealed as much. Sites easily trust up in this circumstance are the www.nigerianworld.com, www.nigeriamasterweb.com and www.nigeriannews.com amongst many others. I encountered few others serendipitously. The controversial ones were easier to identify, particularly through the "troubles", they cause Nigerian governments and elites. The "troubles" were through their daring, unconventional, non-equivocal, but sometimes flawed reportage of exclusive stories-stories that local Nigerian newspapers web editions would ordinarily not report. The criticisms most

times serve as leads or online sources for other news agencies, and even local newspapers. Offline and other online references to them by migrants' were always common as well. Examples of these are www.saharareporters.com, www.elendureports.com and www.pointblanknews.com. Apart from these, I coincidentally came across some other sites through the regular use of the Internet, and a usual use of numerous search engines. Rather than being inadequate, it was quite a constant challenge to whittle them down, via sorting the "relevant" from

the "irrelevant". In working through the data, there is however the element of human errors through missing out valuable items or by way of leaving out potentially useful themes or sub-themes. The outlining of key issues offered a sense of direction. Besides, the harmonizing effect of triangulation is valuable enough to take analyses closer to the general picture. Though the interests of websites studied are sometimes vague, I have grouped them on the strength of themes that regularly prevail.

A typology of observed websites

TYPE OF WEBSITE	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLES
Type A: News and current affairs websites	These are migrants' websites. The interests of these websites are diverse. They focus on different Nigerian, and other related issues. The issues could be political, economic, social, or family. They operate like the "real life" media, particularly the print, with sections and sub-sections on different sectors	www.nigeriamasterweb.com www.nigeriaworld.com www.nanka.com www.nigeriavillagesquare.com www.nigeriansinamerica.com www.saharareports.com www.elendureports.com www.pointblanknews.com www.naijapages.com www.nigeriaweb.com www.dawodu.com www.odili.net www.nigeriawatchnews.com www.naijamailnews.com www.thetimesofnigeria.com www.nairaland.com www.worldskipnews.com www.amebonews.com www.wazobia.com www.netnigerianews.com www.nigerianation.com www.nigeriadailynews.com www.nigeriainfornet.com www.naijaweb.com
Type B: Specialised websites	These concentrate on one aspect, or a limited aspect of life. They propagate or promote particular ideas like fashion, ideologies, gender matters, religion, and sports to serve professional interests	www.winnerscanaanland.org www.mfm.com www.rccg.com www.ana.com www.worldmissionagency.org www.chitafrik.com www.nigeriawomen.com www.nigeria-arts.net www.nitpri.org www.anpa.org www.nigerialawyers.org www.aanpweb.org
Type C: Tribal or ethnic sites	This, as the name implies, include pages of migrant groups interested in continuing with their Nigerian tribal or ethnic cleavages	www.edonation.com www.arewaonline.com www.asaba.com www.zumunta.com www.yorubahomepage.com www.oduduwa.com www.Igbo-net.com www.biafraland.com www.aro-chukwu.com www.egbeIsokanyoruba.com www.Arondizogwunetwork.com www.warri.com www.uromicommunity-ny.com

		www.rivnet.com www.amanaonline.com www.irinnews.com
Type D: Blogs and individual websites	In this category are <i>bloggers</i> , and individuals with sites devoted to propagating an idea, or to campaign for an area of interest. They are also of occasional pages of those who simply set up sites for an event and then fail to continue with it thereafter.	www.nigeriamuse.com www.uchenworah.com www.nigerianthoughts.com
Type E: Organisations/corporate bodies' websites	These are sites of groups and migrant associations, not necessarily tribally or ethnically based, but concerned about migrant Nigerians in general, irrespective of tribe or creed. In this group are also corporate bodies' sites.	www.nigerialeds.com www.nido-nl.org www.nido-europe.com www.yahoo.com www.google.com www.msn.com
Type F: Official websites	Official sites include government sites like the Nigerian governments', alongside those of other foreign missions.	www.nigeriahighcommissionuk.com
Type G: Other websites	Here I include sites not necessarily, directly Nigerian related but have sections or resources on Nigerians and perhaps on the migrants.	www.cnn.com www.bbc.com www.allafrica.com
Type H: Nigerian websites	In this classification are online versions of Nigeria based media organisations. They help to understand how migrants probably relate with Nigeria through them, or how the site owners may perceive the absent people, and for any other themes that may relate with the research.	www.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/Africa www.cnn.com www.youtube.com

While the first six categories above are either constructed, or administered from outside country of origin, the last comprise of those constructed or administered from Nigeria. Some from the Nigerian sites, like www.worldmissionagency.org has migrants as its targets. Other than these specific cases, there were other “floating” but relevant materials. They are not necessarily in websites, but came up in search engines. Many times, the intention may just be to while away time on the Internet. The act of idling away may lead to valuable discoveries that became helpful to understanding key issues under investigation. It is also noteworthy that many of these websites share addresses between and within themselves. With one site having links to other useful sites, a surfer is often tempted to move between them, such that surfing one site could translate into surfing many others at every other time.

Observation was in use as this work waded through the massive space of Nigerian migrants' online life. It was through participation, via the examination of virtual materials in bits and pieces and as best possible. It was also through understanding and interpreting the materials not as a distant observer, but as a submerged investigator interested in the good, the bad and the ugly. These were all towards the discovery of key meanings, in an evolving Internet culture. Again, I took notes as the

observations of the resources went on. Images and figures useful for illustrations were also in consideration. At the end, the meanings from there were indexed around communication with Nigeria, or lack of it; manifestation of transnationalism; expression of nationalism; and indications on identity. The “return” myth also counted as a sub-theme. These were in comparison with a similar exercise that followed the transcribed interviews, for purposes of establishing relationships or lack of it. It explains why discussions and analyses will feature a simultaneous mix of germane quotations from face-to-face interviews, quotes, statements, figures and images from websites, listservs, newsgroups, chat rooms, e-mail lists and news pages. Apart from this, the third adopted technique, survey, (I will explain this shortly) is often times integrated into the analytical process. It is a way of figuratively illustrating ideas. This is before or after narrations, where it is appropriate. These are especially common where materials from interviews and observations are inadequate. Other than this, qualitative methodology complements the quantitative in a triangulated process of balancing. Nevertheless, quantitative method was limited to a survey, which amongst other things, helped in the formation of categories; achieve geographical representation of the migrants and the contextual mapping of their activities. I will therefore

now discuss this and then follow it with how the conduct went.

1.2 Quantitative Research

Survey: participation through a response to set questions

Survey research usually seeks to produce numerical statistics about a sample proportion of a population. This is always through questions that would later be analysed (Fowler, 2002:1-2). The sample frame is to represent that population (Hutton, 1990:8 cited in Blaxter, et al, 1996:77), from where meanings come through a well thought out process. The aim is to derive maximum connotations from respondents. It brings forth results that could be representative of the larger sample (Blaxter, et al, *ibid*: 79). While the questions should avoid prejudice, Berger (2000:188) notes two types namely descriptive and analytic. The first seeks information on “age, gender, marital status, occupation, race or ethnicity, income and religion and to relate this information to opinions, beliefs, values, and behaviours”, the second is concerned about “why people behave the way they do”. The importance of the first type is the formation of categories and identifying differences between groups in a sample. It gives an inner picture of those studied and offers an opportunity for a comparative analysis of data, mostly in the figurative sense. This form of survey is more popular than the analytical variant, usually needed for the development of hypotheses, testing it and the investigation of casual relationships between variables (Berger, 2000:189-9). Survey techniques can be through interviews or the administration of questionnaires. The interview can also be face-to-face or on telephone. Distribution of questionnaires can be in various ways including the post, e-mail or physical, which is hand-to-hand (Berger, 2000; Frankfort-Nachmias, et al, 1996). The choice of a technique is dependent on the skill, experience and perception of the researcher. The core goals of reliability should however be an important consideration, to ensure the validity and the usefulness of data (Gunter, 2000:23).

Importantly, survey is helpful to structuring and standardization. Survey also helps the understanding of bits and pieces of differences amongst groups. Understanding possible relationship to each other can also come from there. A limitation of the survey is often in fact that data is more in figures and diagrams. The exclusion of inner details may also emerge (Blaxter, et al, 1996:79). These details emerge in the nuances embedded in people’s conducts, but easily lost in figurative expressions.

Other more expressive research methods predominantly of the qualitative variety challenge the attempt of survey analysis to reduce the complexities of human behaviour to numbers. Survey process could also be costly, time consuming and could yield poor response rate (Frankfort-Nachmias, et al, 1996). The survey in this project is descriptive as it complements the qualitative techniques. This is through the formation of typologies, the identification of migrants’ particularities, and in the making of meanings out of their complexities—a basic character in human interaction.

The surveying process

Thinking of questions to ask respondents began nearly the same time as the research programme. A higher momentum came from around December 2005. The questions were finally ready in early February 2006. There were thirty-six questions in all (See Appendix 3). Piloting took place between early February, and early March 2006. This was in Leeds, with seven people. Their responses were quite helpful. For instance, one or two respondents called my attention to the possible future difficulty in analysing a section, where intensity of cases through numbers (one, two, three or four), was to be known. However, analysis would still have been possible, but making responses straightforward was an improvement. I agreed with the suggestions, did some modification and then went fully back to the field. Armed with 250 questionnaires, distribution began in Leeds and then London. Each questionnaire was with a self-addressed envelope, with my university address. This was preferred to the home address, to give a sense of “scholarship” to the respondents, even if the home address may do no less.

I distributed the questionnaires initially in Leeds. It was at meetings, to members of Nigerian Community, at Nigerian churches on Sundays and at colleges and university campuses to designated Nigerian students. Volunteers came from those who promised to give friends and family members not necessarily known to me. The promises were either seldom fulfilled, or perhaps those contacted failed to respond. My direct intervention was always the trigger of replies. Meaning that, I often had to chase prospective respondents myself. Snowballing also took place in many ways. It was one questionnaire per respondent (Bradley, 1999: 1). In London, the distributions were at meetings, and at Nigerian and African restaurants. It was also at churches and to friends, colleagues and acquaintances. Interestingly, on an occasion in an African restaurant, some non-

Nigerians including a Cameroonian and a Ghanaian heard about my task and sought participation. “We are all Africans, our problems and experiences are the same”, one of them says as he sipped his drink. It took a polite rejection statement to discourage their jocular persistence. The brief incident was nevertheless a reminder of the need to be concerned about origin of respective respondents. The investigation, on this occasion, was about Nigerian migrants and I needed to avoid distractions.

I shared a hundred questionnaires in Leeds and London. Fifty were reserved for chanced encounters. Twenty-one questionnaires of the 250 produced ended up in my file. And like a forewarning I received from an official of the Nigerian Community Leeds, through whom I snowballed, “responses may be very, very poor”, it was indeed so. The distributions were between March and June, a period of four months. Again, the processes took me back and forth London and Leeds. By the middle of April 2006, only about 79 questionnaires were back to me. I keyed the responses into the SPSS file I had opened for analyses as they came. “Data keying delays are eliminated” (Watt, J. 2005:1) through this systematic, one-after-the-other approach. Alongside the 21 leftover questionnaires in file, I rolled out a hundred more. Again, 50 were distributed in London and Leeds through the same method, including random sampling and snowballing at the migrants’ gatherings. This time, it was with a heightened aggression, perseverance, and pressure for those still with the questionnaires to respond. I also sent some through the post to sourced addresses. In ones, twos, threes, fours and fives, they started trickling in. By the end of June 2006, I recorded 73 more responses, making the total to be 152. Two responses could not however be used. This was because while one was strangely and surprisingly vulgar, the other commented outside the tick boxes, such that it was impossible to recognise preferences. I eventually worked with 150 responses. During the process, I was again conscious of the need to reach all groups: men/women; old/young; rich/poor; skilled/unskilled; and the employed/unemployed. The determination of these, particularly age, nature of work and whether employed or not was through simple inquiry from the respondents, or as shown in the relevant sections on the questionnaire. The efforts made are in the analyses of binaries. I applied the same effort to the determination of duration of residency, which should be long enough to reveal migration traits. The labours are hopefully productive, as will be shown in the findings.

In sum, and for accuracy, it is conceivable to sample as many migrants as possible. In doing so, cost, time, and manageability of data need be in consideration. It explains the restriction of sample to Leeds and London. Importantly, the sampling procedure was of the probability type. The variant oscillated between simple random sampling and cluster sampling. It was simple random sampling because (except in few cases of snowballing), respondents were indiscriminately chosen from across the two migrants’ bases. It sometimes included clusters because most respondents were from the two cities and from groups, associations or communities therein. The survey expectantly helped the research process chiefly in the area of mapping or situating participants in terms of their categories, class and attitudinal characteristics. It also helped on how these differentiations relate to variables in the analyses of key themes. London and Leeds may be a small case for a globally dispersed people, but their disposition therein is characteristics of migration experiences in many ways.

Triangulated technique as a basis for triangulated analyses

Significantly, the Internet presents a diverse and interweaving analytical theme that often makes the selection of method for its study difficult (Guimaraes Jr, 2005:141; Schneider, et al, 2005: 157). A combination of methods for investigating matters related to it has therefore become attractive. Generally, mixing methods can be useful as it sieves personal prejudices possibly inherent in a method (Denzin, cited in Franfort-Nachmias, et al, 1996:206).

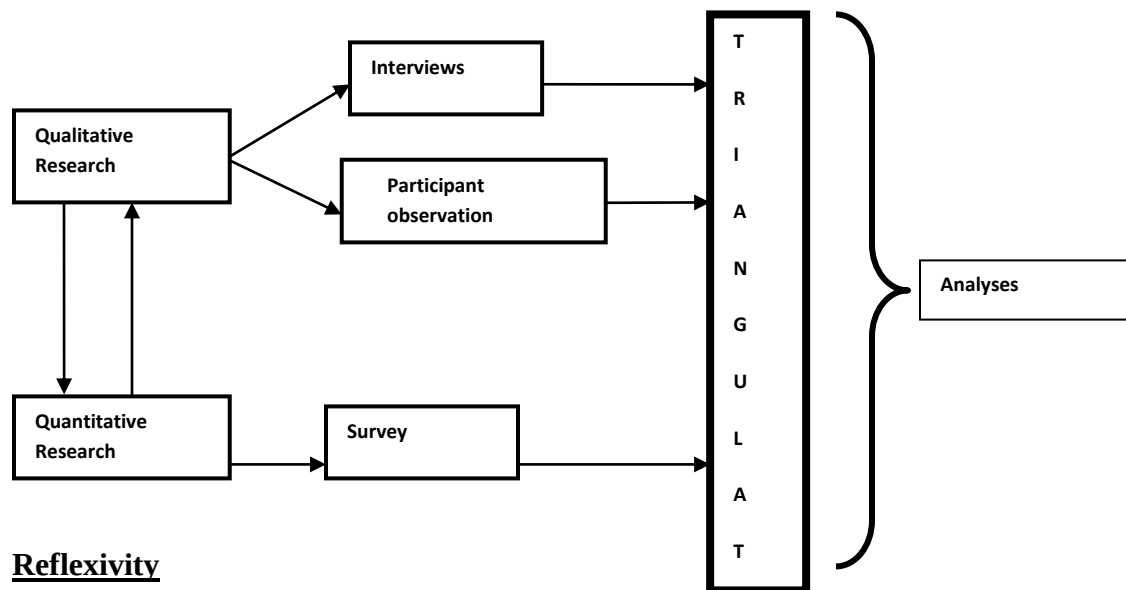
Triangulation represents an important strategy for maximising the use of various methods. Also regarded as convergent methodology or multitrait (Campbell and Fiske, 1959, cited in Jick, 1979:1), it defines the complementary nature of qualitative and quantitative research. Rather than being contending methods, it establishes a compromise between the two broad research types (Jick, *ibid*: 1). The idea of triangulation is derived from surveying. It came through the practise of finding a spot from different reference points, (Smith, 1975:273, cited in Jick, 1979:1; Blaikie, 2000: 263-70, cited in Grix, 2001:84). Social researchers use it to achieve validity, accuracy, reliability, and credibility. It can be “between (or across) methods” and “within methods” (Denzin, 1998: 301-2, cited in Jick, 1979:1). The first refers to the application of distinct methods, while the second is about utilising different techniques within a given method. Jick (1979:2)

sums its relevance thus: “‘Within method’, triangulation essentially involves cross-checking for internal consistency or reliability, while ‘between methods’, triangulation tests the degree of external validity”. It eventually enables comparisons and the objectification of findings. It allows greater confidence in results, given the chance to compare and contrast outcomes of techniques in use.

Nevertheless, triangulation could as well be delicate and confusing if a research question is ambivalent. Because a “whole picture” anticipated through triangulation may be illusory, as according to Silverman, (2005: 122) it can “speedily lead to scrappy research based on under-analysed data and an imprecise or theoretically indigestible research problem”. For triangulation to achieve its aim therefore, research question need to be clear and conceptual. For this work, triangulating lingers between qualitative and quantitative research. In the first instance, it involves interviews. Then there was a

survey through the semi-structured type. There is also participant observation. Included here are direct observation and participation. In the specific context of this work, and as seen in the foregoing, triangulation has been useful for comparisons, for testing the validity of meanings through comparisons with results from other techniques. In another sense, triangulating dovetailed into triangulated analyses, as examinations of findings was not from result of one method but also from the trajectory of others. It led to comparing and contrasting, mutual enhancement of techniques, and sometimes the elimination of facts in cases where other methods point to the contrary. The diagram below illustrates how the methods converge and interrelate. It gives a picture of how the approaches differ, but are dependent and balancing. It also point to fact that the understanding of methods may be different, but analyses and discussions of research can be more credible when techniques interlock.

Figure 1 - Relationship between the adopted methods



Reflexivity invites us to engage with our position, biases and preferences in a research process, on a continuous basis. It nudges the courage of the researcher through revealing personal experiences and circumstances that could shape the outcome of the research, or affect the natural claim to objectivity. “A process of critical self-reflection” (Schwandt, 1997), it partly answers the question: what is my place in the endeavour? (Ibid: 1997). An evidence of

a “researcher’s deep learning and unlearning” (Kleinsasser, 2000:2), reflexivity challenges a social researchers claim to neutrality. This challenge is not probably a let-down of objectivity, but one that highlights its limits. It allows for a constant consideration of the place of the self in the research, and an admission of possible limitations of the researcher in relation to the object of study. An honest approach to this could increase the level of

believability and the credibility of the research outcome (Gillespie, 1995; Schwandt, 1997; Yanow, 2006). This is because feigning a natural objectivity in social research raises suspicion on impossibility. However, admitting limitations, biases, and preferences is an admission of human frailty, which may not be absent in a research project, and which at the same time does not dishonour the research. It rather gives the reader allowances for reflections (Yanow, 2006).

Finlay (2003) argues that reflexivity is different from reflection, as it is “more immediate, continuing, dynamic and (a) subjective self-awareness” (page 108), while reflection is more detached and deferrable (Ibid: 108). It should come about alongside the research work, given its ability to help reliability. It is a researchers’ task to define his/her role in a subjective way, to help a better understanding of the claim to objectivity. It has to be simultaneous with the investigation, not postponed. Deferring it could question a researcher’s commitment to reliability, as a reflexive process helps in finding balances between the position of the researcher and the subject of the study. That balance, a between situation, is significant in the sense in which it serves as the position for the proper discerning of meaning (Hammer.....cited in Georgiou, 2001: 85). It is the proper spot for learning, which is the object of the research, and unlearning (Kleinsasser, 2000:2), which represents the impossibilities inherent in the location. Most times “discussed in relation to a researcher’s empirical work” (Brown, 2006: 2), the researcher is expected to acknowledge that s/he is not distanced from the subject of investigation. In this circumstance, s/he is supposed to be reflective, to explain how the likely assumptions that influenced the course arose (Ruud, 1998 cited in Stige, 2002:3).

The demand of reflexivity does not invalidate a researchers’ work. It is a reminder of fact that an understanding of a subject of study is through a subjective route of interpretation, as against an absolute reflection of what is (Georgiou, 2001:83). Being part is not necessarily a discredit. Contextualising the part and as it relates to subjects in a discursive manner produces meanings. The reader understands the meanings better, following a perception of the researcher’s epistemological backgrounds. Though limitations may feature in reflexivity course, it may not affect the scholars’ analytical ability (Georgiou, Ibid). It simply implicates meanings as discursive, irrespective of the place of the researcher. It shows that findings are a construction, which went through several defining

processes, between the research and subject, and within the researcher as an individual. Reflexivity also implies that the scholar be mindful (Gillespie, 1995: 67) in investigating subjects to which one is familiar. This posture could help to avoid some pitfalls in interview, or ethnographic data collection like “reactivity”, and “going native”. I shall now discuss reflexive thoughts that I can associate with this research.

Forward and backward thoughts on position

I embarked on this project not necessarily as a long-established researcher. I have before now being a journalist, with some years of practice in Nigeria. Some of the participants who knew me, or have read my reports in Nigeria, regard me not just as journalist but also as a writer. An acknowledgement as an academic researcher was going to be new. In approaching them for interviews for this work, it was possible a memory of journalistic interview lingered in them. With me as well, it was not easy to ward off the feeling that the purpose of this interview was no longer to beat a short deadline, dateline, and get a by line. It was scholarly research driven. While it was possible to embellish, and work at keeping the interviewee as a possible source of information next time, the case may be different this time. Clarity, precision of meaning and a one-off interviewer/interviewee relationship is likely to be the case in this situation. The skills learned as a journalist may have been helpful in terms of approach, persistence in the face of an evasive response, or a disinterest to participate; the present need to be more formal and to be less flowery in the use of materials moderated those skills. The journalism zeal to be the first with the story, also sustained the research process. This is because the migrants are yet to be a subject of an intense academic research. The outcome may come as knew, in a way that could make the researcher a pioneer, or being the first to unearth a phenomenon in the mould of a well-driven investigative journalist. My dispositions hovered between a past and present role, but found a balance in the difference in objectives.

Positioning featured also in my objective in the UK. Here I am as a Nigerian dwelling in the distant like the migrants under investigations. There is though a difference in mission, but circumstances sometimes cross paths. While the people under investigation are mainly economic migrants, I have travelled the distance for further education. I use the Internet as they do. Therefore, I experience aspects of its mediation possibilities, as well. Again, I remember Nigeria like the typical economic migrant. (Those on

focus should however have spent at least five years abroad). Perhaps, the idea of return is regular to me because of statutory limitations on length of stay. It is also more so, because I am officially still on study leave. Like the typical migrant however, thoughts of return becomes more frightening as the years roll by, and as I adapt more to life in UK. It is therefore possible to put oneself in the position of participants sometimes. This situation enables the practical appreciation of migrants' experiences, particularly in relation to thoughts on return, imagination of home, remittances, and race. They may also occasionally blur the difference between researcher and subject, even while tasking the scholars' sense of objectivity. The development of a more critical disposition was nevertheless encouraged during this process.

Negotiating the research course through the prism of my tribal identity as a Nigerian was of concern as well. Nigeria is a country of over 250 ethnic groups. They are into 36 states in a federation. There are three major groups in this multi-ethnic state. They are Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa. There is always a tension in their effort to co-exist in Nigeria. Sometimes, this trait features even when abroad. I am of the Yoruba group. Even then, I am a minority within this tribe. Moreover, the Yoruba people are reputed to prefer the UK as destination point in migration. They are also more cosmopolitan, because of an early exposure to Western education through colonisation. Chances were therefore that they would be easier to approach, not just because of my name that suggest a Yoruba affiliation, but also because of their relative sophistication, and an attendant disposition to be more receptive to an academic endeavour like this one. I made a conscious effort to reduce my *yorubanness*, to get the perspectives of migrants groups from other tribes. This experience was similar both offline, and online. It was however easier to sample other groups online than it was off it. Some satisfaction came from here, as the thrust of the research is the Internet.

Again, many interviews with female participants were in company of others. They were either, their spouse, partners, boyfriends or children. An objection to this situation might amount to a wrong case of having no female sample. The women were understandably in their likely role positions as wives, girlfriends, or mothers. The presence of others in the course of some of the interviews might have influenced comments. It might also have led to some self-censoring. Talking to a male interviewer may in addition add some other influences, which interaction with an "Other" could bring about. Thoughts on these possibilities continued, just as it was when on two

occasions I considered the level of rationality of two men interviewed while drinking alcohol. The men had insisted at different times, in London that would only oblige me at their relaxation point, which were restaurants. At least, they drank two bottles of beer within the one hour that each of the interviews lasted. How then I am sure that the men were rational in their submissions, or simply talking under the influence of alcohol? It was up to me in those circumstances to make allowances for "excesses", through thinking about statements that seemed most rational. The ability to do this is also dependent on my understanding of the effects of alcohol on thoughts. I engaged with the situations with a critical consciousness, in the determination to be as close as possible to the truth.

2. Conclusion

The weak boundaries of Nigerian migrants' online activities were an influence on the design of this research. Like the Internet space, the activities of the people are wide ranging. They are decentred, diffused and sometimes interweaving and interrelated. Like the typical Internet research, it is ludicrous to assume a study of the entire space of activity, like any claim to investigating the entire websites of the migrants. Attempt at doing this is an open invitation to misrepresentation, misinterpretations and even fallacies. At the same time, the Internet and embedded social activity constantly need examination consequent upon its new significance as an alternative space of interaction. Delineating the scope of study to the observation of some websites, e-mail lists, newsgroups, chatrooms, and different Internet interaction spaces like Facebook, *Bebo* and Myspace, seems therefore logical in a study of this type. This would prepare the ground for a reasonable testing of hypothesis (Frankfort-Nachmias, et al, 1996:99), and the examination of the relationships between variables (Grix, 2001). The scope must however be sensible enough to enable what Frankfort-Nachmias, et al, (1996:114) summed as comparisons, manipulations, controls and generalizations.

In this context, the UK was a case study. Even within this, London and Leeds were sampling places for survey. They were also places for interviewing and for participant observation- the offline techniques used. With hundreds of migrants' across the world, and with many dispersed between and across tens of countries, a conception of an investigation of their activity need be done with manageability in mind. The chosen space should however be significant enough to help general analyses. Care was to ensure

that inferences from techniques are verifiable through complementing online approaches like observation. It is therefore the reason why themes from interviews like views on the communication qualities of the Internet, its impact on transnationalism, and nationalism and on identity construction, are sometimes analysed alongside corresponding or divergent ones in online materials in the analytical sections. Survey outcome are also sometimes in evidence as illustrations to identify categories likely featuring from an online data. The balancing effects of this, keeps the results as close as achievable to certainty.

Also significant is the examined online spaces. Importantly, the entire Internet space is diverse, dispersed, divergent and nebulous (Lankshear, et al, 2005:327). It is nearly impossible to study all migrants' related websites. Neither can all their newsgroups, blogs, mailing lists, usenets and other facilities be a matter of simultaneous investigation. While hundreds of these already exist, many more are proliferating. It is the generic character of the Internet space as a new, developing and expanding one. I identified popular, controversial and few other sites with no such features to make a reasonable meaning from this "field" of study. The expectation is that these ones stream across physical locations. It therefore weakens the relevance of the localities of participants on there.

Lankshear, et al, (2005:327) quoted Sharf (1999:254), as suggesting that online researchers should

(i) introduce themselves clearly to online groups or individuals who are the intended focus of study with respect to their identities, roles and purposes; (ii) make concerted efforts to contact directly and obtain consent from individuals who have posted messages they want to use as data; and (iii) 'seek ways to maintain an openness to feedback from the e-mail participants who are being studied'.

This comment is coming against the background of debates on a *modus operandi* for online research. It is here because it contextualises an approach to online research, which this study sets out to do. Much as the recommended processes were in consideration in some cases, a wholesale adoption of the procedure could take eternity given a crowd of participants. The suggestion is again mostly useful for a research that is wholly online based, not one that mixes complementing methods in both online and offline spaces. It is also against the argument that the Internet is a public space and contributions should be

public materials that can be a subject of sundry uses (Dochartaigh, 2002; Hewson, et al, 2003; www.aoir.org). Materials not meant for public consumption can be restricted through security controls like encryptions, passwords, and registrations. Such would necessitate permissions and applications for entries. This is if at all, materials in those domains are useful for analyses. Though registrations for participation took place in minor cases, a majority did not require it. All materials were, freely accessed in the open "field" of the Internet.

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